

NEWS RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

CONTACTER: **Marie Yolène GILLES COLAS**
PHONE: (509)2940-1222 / 3650-8103 / 3463-4192/
(509)2244-0076 / 2244-1496
Cell : (509) 3728-8466 / 3556-4296
FAX: (509) 2244-4146

***RNDDH strongly condemns the incident which occurred in Feb. 17, 2012 at the
Faculty of Ethnology.***

The ***National Human Rights Defense Network*** (RNDDH) is deeply dismayed by the violent incident which occurred at the ***Faculty of Ethnology***, Friday, February 17, 2012, involving the President of the Republic, Joseph Michel Martelly, students and other individuals in the society.

On Friday, February 17, 2012, around two-thirty in the afternoon, a person in a white Toyota Land Cruiser with tinted windows came to the faculty premises and informed students present at the faculty that the President of the Republic, Joseph Michel Martelly, would visit them at that time. Students responded that because they had not been informed of the visit, they were not available to receive him. The ***Faculty of Ethnology***, which had organized with other institutions, from 15 to 18 February 2012, an international symposium, entitled "***Ethnology and Haitian people, citizen national capacity building***," was not expecting any official visit of the President of the Republic.

However, within some minutes, the President, leading a huge cheering crowd, appeared at the gate of the faculty. Students have refused him access. Offended by this refusal, the President and his group of people, chanting slogans in his favor, went around the faculty several times. Later, people who accompanied the President broke into the faculty premises, through the metal sheet fence from the west side of the building

RNDDH would like to emphasize that this wall which was once built with bricks, collapsed during the January 12, 2010 earthquake. It overlooks the ethnology office which is attached to the faculty premises through an emergency door which is adjacent

ology lecture room. We must emphasize that this of the earthquake in order to facilitate evacuation of students, if necessary in future.

This was followed by a fight, aggravated by throwing of stones and automatic gun shots. Students were running in every direction at the faculty. Others were forced to hide in the restroom in order to escape the blows from attackers. Many, trying to escape, were injured while others were openly beaten by these people. At that time, the institution officials had to find a way to evacuate participants at the conference which was abruptly interrupted because of the commotion.

The situation was alarming: several students were maltreated. For examples:

- Jean Emile DUVERSEAU, a fourth-year student of psychology at the **Faculty of Ethnology**, was severely beaten by people mentioned above at the faculty. He has received several blows of stones at his hip, head and neck. He was seriously wounded, and therefore lost consciousness. He was rushed to the **Haiti's State University Hospital (HUEH)**.
- Rolinx AUGUSTIN, a third year student of Anthropology-Sociology at the Faculty of Ethnology tried to escape when he was arrested by several individuals. He was beaten. Some of his personal effects and one thousand (1000) gourds were stolen by the attackers.

In addition, the windscreens of at least a dozen vehicles were broken; several windows of the building were broken. The faculty library and the office of Ethnology were vandalized. Several books were torn and drums stolen. Suitcases and laptop computers belonging to students were carried away by these people, as well as pieces of metal sheet forming the western wall of the building as well as the wooden support.

RNDDH has been able to see damages caused by bullets and stones on the walls, broken windows and debris as well as broken windscreens of six (6) vehicles parked on the faculty yard.

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RNDDH is putting in to question obscure motives of the President, who, when going to the faculty, had to be surrounded by a group of individuals in all likelihood, extremely

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According to many; this incident was a planned attack against the **Faculty of Ethnology**, in retaliation for the previous refusal of access endured by the President of the Republic in December 2011. He then tried unsuccessfully to besiege the faculty premises.

RNDDH emphasize that despite the constitutional provisions making the President the guarantor of public institutions, he has no right to decide to besiege an independent, autonomous institution without prior notice to the university authorities. In this sense, RNDDH invites the President to respect the minimum administrative decency principles. However, RNDDH believes that students must also demonstrate civility towards the authorities established.

RNDDH concerned that the many authorities on the scene at the time of the incident, have taken no action to prevent the commission from the incident which led to the violation of several fundamental rights including the rights to the physical integrity and private property, guaranteed by the 1987 Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various conventions which Haiti has adheres to.

RNDDH draws again the attention of society on the fact that many of the persons who ensure security for the President did not receive adequate training in this regard and are neither members of the Haitian National Police (HNP); this is contrary to the Constitution. This is a situation that, if not rectified, is likely to lead to other similar incidents which will give rise to violations of human rights.

RNDDH warns the pertinent authorities against any attempt of persecution of students. The university sector, organizations defending human rights and the society in general, are not willing to let trample on the democracy gained thanks to major battles against totalitarian regimes.

While urging the pertinent authorities to take steps to prevent the recurrence of such acts, RNDDH recalls that the University, like every education Area is, according to international principles, an inviolable space to gunmen. Therefore, it can not in any case become a place of lawlessness, where lecturers, studentsqlives or any person attending the university could be in danger in any way.

Port-au-Prince, feb 24, 2012

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